

AUTHOR'S NOTE

One of my editors made the comment about halfway through the story she felt as though Quinn's depression was a "non-issue" at that point. My initial reaction was, "Oh shit, I need to fix that. Her depression is definitely an issue. It's the whole point of the story."

Upon further reflection, though, I was pleased by the comment. Because actually, that is the point of the story.

That is how depression often works. It is a physical presence, like Peter Pan's shadow. Peter's shadow is supposed to be stuck to him. It's supposed to be an extension of his body, always *right* there, following him, mimicking him, reflecting him. Yet, somehow Peter loses his shadow and it runs off on its own for a while, doing whatever shadows do.

A lot of times what happens with depression is it sticks around for long periods of time, long enough to rub its darkness into your soul. Long enough to make you believe that that is who you are now: a shadow, a cruel whisper of who you thought you were, or wanted to be. And then, it will run off for a while, leaving you blind-sided and confused. You think, "Hey, maybe I am fine. Maybe I was just in a mood, maybe I was just being dramatic. I'm fine." You laugh at yourself, you feel crazy. You feel guilty. Your shadow stays away long enough for you to really start to believe you're okay, and normal, and comfortable. It stays away long enough for you to make plans, because you now think you're capable of actually living. And then, with a twisted grin and a hunger in its black eyes, it swoops back over you. It taps you on the shoulder with a fake, mocking sympathy: "Did you really think I had left for good? How silly." Just like that, you're paralyzed again. The whiplash is enough to snap your neck.

As if that weren't bad enough, sometimes you grow comfortable with the shadow. It becomes almost a safety net—I can't do that, I'm

depressed. I don't feel like it, I'm depressed. I don't know what I think, I'm depressed. Who am I? It doesn't matter, I'm depressed.—that you default to. You think, "Hey, how dare you invade me and then leave me to fend for myself." Enter: Peter trying to rub his shadow back on with a bar of soap. Twisted, right?

So, yes. Quinn's depression does appear to be a non-issue during that middle chunk of story. The reader, hopefully, notices it and so does Quinn. She goes to Malibu and thinks she's better there, which she is. She moves to LA and it's very nearly a piece of cake for her. She lets herself develop relationships with Finnley and June and, most surprisingly, Ryker and thinks, "Why did I resist this before? What was I making such a big deal about?"

Then, she loses her shit for absolutely no reason and remembers she's depressed. It's ridiculous how it dawns on you again, but that's how depression operates. It toys with your mind and jerks you around and does whatever it can to cripple you—and for no discernible reason more often than not.

I obsessed over that critique, and I tried a bunch of different ways to make Quinn's depression more of an apparent issue. It all felt disingenuous and forced. I didn't set out to write a dramatized version of depression. My goal was to accurately and bluntly depict one of depression's many shapes.

Mental illness, depression, and anxiety, come in all different packages and one person's version not less than another's. I've read a lot of really beautiful books about mental illness and would think about how little my depression was in the face of those stories. There is no such thing as a "little" depression. Every case is life altering and destructive, and that is why I had to write Quinn's story.

Depression is not a character trait. It's not your personality. It is a parasite, but it is not you. You are valid, your illness is valid, and you

are worth the patience, understanding, and care that you need in order to feel okay. Don't feel guilty for taking care of yourself. Others will not understand, and that's okay.

Do what you need to do.